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Sermon on the Gospel for Epiphany.

MATT. 2, 1—12.

The purpose of this Gospel is to declare the fact that Jesus is the Savior of the Gentiles also. The festival of Epiphany, or manifestation, is the Gentiles' Christmas. The Gospel set apart for this day presents to us the wise men, who were heathen, worshiping the heavenly Child, and proclaims the great truth which is so important to us all who are of heathen extraction, of heathen ancestors, that the Christ-child is our Savior also, though we are not of the house of Israel according to the flesh.

But as this subject has been treated repeatedly, we shall take up a different point in our Gospel for to-day. Something which has been puzzling men all along in this narrative is the star which the wise men beheld in the East. A natural explanation was sought for that star, and when in the year 1604 a noted astronomer, Kepler, discovered a peculiar conjunction of three of the brightest stars, these three stars coming real close together to the human eye, it was claimed at once that the mystery was solved which for ages had been surrounding the star of Bethlehem, that the star had been discovered which the wise men beheld in the East. Astronomers began to figure that they might find out when the last conjunction of these three stars took place, and they did arrive at the conclusion which they expected to reach at the outset, namely, that there was a similar conjunction at the time of Christ's birth. Now there was no more mystery about the star of the wise men. Unbelievers rejoiced to see science triumph over "superstition," and ever since then we read in books and periodicals of the star of Bethlehem as a real natural thing, as a conjunction of several bright stars.

What foolishness! Does not our Gospel plainly state that the star of the wise men was something outside of the ordinary course of nature? Did not the star disappear after they had seen it in the

East, and remain unseen all the while they were journeying to Jerusalem? Does a conjunction of stars suddenly disappear? Did not the star most unexpectedly reappear, when they proceeded from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, going before them, and standing over where the young Child was? And do common stars suddenly reappear, and go from north to south, and remain fixed over a certain spot? Are not the stars so high above us that they seem to go with us wherever we go, and is not their tendency from east to west? — No; this was not an ordinary star. It was a light which God had placed in the lower regions of the atmosphere. It was, as it were, a torch borne by the invisible hand of an angel; not a conjunction of three stars, but one solitary star, bright and brilliant. — But as we, pilgrims on earth, journey through this life, there are three stars to illumine our earthly path, and we shall do well to observe these stars. The subject of our discourse shall be, with the aid of God's Holy Spirit,

THREE STARS FOR EARTHLY WANDERERS.

- I. *The star of Nature.*
- II. *The star of the divine Word.*
- III. *The Star of Bethlehem.*

I.

We read: "*Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea, in the days of Herod the King, behold, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him.*" How did the wise men know that this star was the sign of the newborn King of the Jews? There is but one way to account for that, and it is this. At that time it was known that the time was fulfilled for the promised Messiah to appear. Not only among the Jews was this known, but, as merchant Jews were living among the Gentiles in different parts of the world, especially in the large cities, it became, to a certain degree, known among the Gentiles also. Also in the far East, in Babylon, where the Jews were well known, where they had been in captivity for seventy years and had made the Babylonians acquainted with their religious literature, the great King promised to the Jews for thousands of years, who was now to come, if the prophecies were true, was the topic of conversation among the learned men. And just then that wonderful star appeared to the wise men, a star which they had never seen and for whose sudden appearance they could not account. Must we be surprised that forthwith they connected the promised Messiah with that wonderful star? Must we be surprised that forthwith they took this wonderful

star for the star of the King of the Jews? God gave them a special star, a star to rouse them, to set them a-thinking, to guide them, that finally they might find their Savior. And not in vain did this star of Nature appear unto them. They obeyed the voice of God in Nature. They went in quest of the promised Deliverer.

The star of Nature continually shines upon us who are wanderers upon this earth. All Nature points to God with a thousand fingers and proclaims to the children of men not only that there is a God, but also that it is their duty to seek after God, if haply they might find Him. "The heavens declare the glory of God: and the firmament showeth His handiwork." There is not the shadow of an excuse for the heathen, the unbeliever, the atheist. Did not the star of Nature shine for him which would have led him to the knowledge of the Truth, if he had paid attention to it?

But in His overwhelming grace and kindness to us, in His fervent desire not to see us run headlong into eternal perdition in our natural sinful state, God sometimes sends us a special star to rouse us, to set us a-thinking, that we might be saved from eternal death. When God visits you with some great calamity, when He smites you with illness, or when death enters your home and deprives you of those whom you love, or when, in some other way, your heart is filled with sorrow and grief, what is it but a special star which God has sent to rouse you, to draw away your thoughts from the things of this earth, and to have you set your affection on the things that are above? When God grants you some great joy, when He delivers you from some great danger, when He prospers and blesses you in some extraordinary way, what is it but a star which God has sent that you should remember your divine Maker and thank Him for His benefits? O let us not remain indifferent, but obey the voice of our God, as the wise men did, when He gives us a special star while we are journeying on the pathway of life.

II.

A second star on life's pathway is the star of the divine Word. We read: "*When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet: And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.*" The star which the wise men had seen did not show them to Jerusalem. They took it for the star of the newborn King of the Jews, and

they were right in that, but the star itself was mute and silent, and revealed nothing. Their own fancy induced them to undertake the long journey to Jerusalem and there to seek the King. How surprised must they have been, when in the capital city nobody knew of the newborn King! And when old King Herod made such a wry face and all Jerusalem was troubled at what they said, what a shock must this have been to them! Was it not enough to make them say one to another, That star did not mean anything after all, and we are on a fool's errand? But now, as they were on the point of giving up all hopes of finding the newborn King, God sent them another star. He made known to them His divine Word, the word of prophecy. The Word revealed to them that their own thoughts had been altogether wrong when they expected to find the promised Messiah in the capital, as an Oriental prince, in royal splendor. The Word revealed to them that the Promised One was to be born in the little village of Bethlehem, which was about six miles south of Jerusalem. Now they had a true guiding star, a star that spoke in the plainest language, a star that could not be misunderstood. Now they knew exactly whither to go, that they might find the newborn King.

The Word of God, the written Word, the Bible, is the only true guiding star for earthly wanderers. The light of Nature reveals to us nothing more than that there is a God, and that we are obliged to serve Him, but it does not tell us who God is and what is His gracious will. The star of Nature leaves us to our own thoughts, and if we follow our own thoughts as to our relation to the divine Maker, we are sure to go the wrong way. Natural religion can save no one. We are all sinners by nature, and the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." He that follows his own thoughts in religion is like the mariner who sails without a compass and without anything to guide his course. Will such a foolish seaman ever arrive at the point of his destination? No; to make sure of our course, to make sure that we are not walking the wrong way, but the right way upon this earth, to make sure of religion, we must behold and follow the star which the Lord God has placed above us, and which shines for all men. We must hear the Word of God and keep it. We must search the Scriptures. The Word of God is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. The Word of God informs us about all those things which we must know for our salvation. The Word of God removes all our doubts and answers all our questions as to God and the hereafter. The Word of God strengthens, upholds, and comforts us in all the trials and tribulations of this present life.

III.

But there is one more star for earthly wanderers. We read: *"Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young Child; and when ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also. When they had heard the King, they departed: and, lo, the star, which they saw in the East, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down, and worshiped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way."* Not a soul goes with the wise men, as they depart from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. Nobody seems to care for the great King whom they came to worship from the far East. The only man who takes an interest in the Child is the old sly fox King Herod. He inquires diligently what time the star appeared. He urges the wise men to make a thorough search for the Child in Bethlehem. He makes them promise to bring him word again, when they have found the Child, that he may worship Him also, as he lies to them; for he meant to kill the Child. But the wise men were not disturbed in the least by the apathy of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They had beheld the star of the divine Word and they believed the Word of the prophet. They proceeded to Bethlehem at once, the reappearing star assured them that their faith was not a delusion, and finally they found the true Star, before whom all other stars must fade and pale, the heavenly Child, the King of kings and Lord of lords; and they worshiped Him, presented their gifts, and returned to their home under divine guidance.

The true Star of Bethlehem is the Word Jesus Christ. He is the Star out of Jacob. He is the Star that brings true happiness into our hearts, while we journey through this life. He is the Star unto whom the star of the divine Word directs us. He is Alpha and Omega, beginning and end of the Holy Scriptures, and all the promises of God are yea in Him and in Him Amen. My friend, all the special stars which God may send you in life, all the joys and sorrows, will not profit you anything, and even the star of the divine Word will not accomplish upon you whereto it has been sent, if you are not brought down upon your knees before the Star of Bethlehem, if you are not led to worship the Savior Jesus who came into

this world for your sake, to take upon Himself all your sins, who lived for you, suffered for you, and died for you on the cross, and to find in the heavenly Child your happiness, your salvation. There is no salvation in any other, and there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. O let us all worship Him who came to seek and to save that which was lost. Let us behold in the heavenly Child, lying in the manger, the forgiveness of all our sins, our life, and our salvation. Let us show our thankfulness to Him in our lives, in bestowing upon Him gifts, in cheerfully supporting His kingdom, in paying liberally to the church and to the mission. Let us walk in this life according to the rule of His Word and be guided by His precepts until He sees us safely home, where we shall abide with Him forever. Thus shall the Star of Bethlehem never cease to shine upon us with His brilliant light, and we shall enjoy happiness and bliss without end. Amen.

H. S.

Funeral Address.

2 TIM. 1, 12.

BELoved MOURNERS:—

So, then, the sad hour of parting has come. The mortal body of your faithful wife and loving mother has now entered upon its last earthly journey, and is soon to find its last resting place in the quiet of the tomb. And this parting fills you with heartrending grief, this separation leaves a nameless void in your hearts. But although with bowed heads and saddened hearts you follow the senseless dust to its rest, you sorrow not as do those who have no hope. Into the darkness of your sorrow and through the mist of your tears there beam down upon you rays of comfort and light. As the glorious sun in his triumphant march scatters apace the gathering clouds, so is God's precious Word able to dissipate your sorrows and to dispel the gloom of your hearts.

From the many beams of comfort which God sheds abroad in His Word, I would select only one for your consideration. It is that blessed word which once afforded comfort to Paul in his great affliction, and so strengthened him that he was able to overcome all his sufferings. I refer to the words: "*I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.*" Let these words of the great crossbearer Paul be your comfort in this hour of sorrow. May the love and grace, the faithfulness and truth of Christ, reflected in these words of the apostle, dry your tears and fill your sorrowing hearts with true joy.

"I know whom I have believed," whom I have trusted! Blessed he that can truthfully speak these words: I know in whom I have put my confidence; namely, in Him who was given for my offenses and raised again for my justification. Blessed trust, blessed faith, this faith, this trust in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Conqueror of sin, death, and hell! To trust in Him means to have conquered with Him, to have died with Him unto sin, to have risen with Him unto life. If this faith lives in my heart, then conscience may accuse me, Satan may assail me, the Law may condemn me, temporal death may carry me off, and hell may threaten to devour me, I may, nevertheless, with head uplifted and joyous heart, exclaim: "*I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.*"

To glory He ascendeth,
I follow Him fore'er.
For Christ, my Head, defendeth
His member from all care:
No enemy I fear,
Because my Head is near.
My Savior is my Shield,
By Him all rage is stilled.

"I know whom I believed!" This blessed trust dwelt in the heart of your beloved one, and in this blessed faith she departed from this life. She knew Him upon whom her trust was built; she knew that, believing in Christ, she was standing upon the firm rock of salvation; she knew Him to be her Savior; she knew that He had gained for her eternal salvation, that He had purchased and won her from sin, death, and the power of the devil. By faith she clothed herself in Jesus' blood and righteousness, and arrayed in this glorious dress she can now joyfully lift up her head. Having confided her soul and its salvation into her Savior's faithful hands and having passed away with this trust in her heart, we know that for her is the promise of the crown of eternal life.

Death has opened the gates of heaven to her, and she is now in the presence of God Himself. Let this, then, be your comfort in this hour of sadness. While bitter tears give token of your grief and great loss, do not lose sight of the fact that your separation is not to be forever. Though her body will now be consigned to the tomb, her soul is in the safe-keeping of Him who has purchased her for Himself with His precious blood. She has now dropped all her cares, and her immortal spirit has mounted, light and joyful, holy and happy, to God, its hope and trust, to Jesus, her Savior and Redeemer, who has appointed her a partaker of His glory. Consider with what rapture she, together with all the saints in light that sur-

round His throne, is now singing her hymns of praise to the glory of the Lamb that was slain for us.

They that die in the Lord shall be crowned with perpetual youth and everlasting joy; all that is evil will vanish, and all that is good shall be theirs forever. There in heaven every perplexity, disappointment, and trouble which it was their lot on earth to bear will be solved and explained. Their eyes, here often filled with tears, will never again be clouded by sorrow; their trembling hearts will there be made joyous and glad. All sufferings and burdens, all griefs and woes, will be forever past, and they will bask without ceasing in the sunshine of their Savior's countenance. Sin will be removed, corruption will be overcome, and a heaven of perfect purity and unbroken peace is theirs forevermore.

Beloved mourners, into this glory and happiness your beloved one has entered. Her sorrow is now turned into eternal joy, her sighs are changed into hymns of praise. I pray you, therefore, dry your tears and with holy resignation say as did Job of old: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Amen.

F. J. L.

Outlines for Sermons on the Gospel-Lessons.

Epiphany.

MATT. 2, 1—12.

The festival of Epiphany occurs twelve days after Christmas, on the 6th of January. The word *Epiphany* comes to us from the Greek language, and means, bringing to light, showing, revealing, making known, or manifestation. The festival is celebrated because of the manifestation of Christ to the Gentile world. The two divisions of mankind at the birth of Christ were Jews and Gentiles. The two points especially brought to notice by the return of the Epiphany season are, first, the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, and, secondly, the *reception* of Christ.

CHRIST'S RECEPTION ON EARTH.

I. *The manner of Christ's reception by Herod.*

- a. Who and what Herod was.
- b. How he received Christ. LUTHER: "He believes the Scriptures. Yet, notwithstanding, he rises up and sets his head straight in opposition to God's Word and work."—1. His fear, v. 3. Job 15, 20. 21. Is. 48, 22.—2. His wicked subtlety, vv. 4. 7. Ps. 2, 2. 4. 5.—3. His falsehood, v. 8.—4. The success of his wicked rage against Christ, v. 12. Ps. 2, 4. 5; 37, 12. 13. 15. 17. 20.

II. *The manner of Christ's reception by the Jews.*

a. How the common people received and welcomed Christ, v. 3.

b. How the chief priests and scribes received Christ, v. 6. LUTHER: "They understand the Scriptures and teach them to everybody, but they themselves do not live according to them." This fact teaches us, first, that it is not always those who have the most religious privileges that give Christ most honor, John 1, 11. How often the same thing may be seen among ourselves!—Secondly, that there may be knowledge of Christ and Scripture in the head, while there is no faith in the heart, Matt. 15, 8. The priests and scribes knew where Christ should be born, but they never went to seek the Savior. Their heads were better than their hearts. Let us beware of resting satisfied with head knowledge. What is the state of our hearts?

III. *The manner of Christ's reception by the wise men from the East.*

a. Who and what these wise men were. LUTHER: "No doubt, these wise men were the remnant of those who had been the scholars of Daniel the prophet. The Evangelist calls them magi; such may be regarded as students of nature."—Gentiles.

b. How they received Christ. LUTHER: "These are they who openly and freely confess Christ and His truth."

1. They diligently seek Christ, vv. 1. 2. A splendid example of spiritual diligence! Where is our self-denial and courage? What pains do we take about our souls?

2. They find Christ, v. 8, guided by the Word of God, v. 6, and His star, v. 2. LUTHER: "To find the Child at all they had to obey the Scriptures; these are the proper star and sun which direct us to Christ. Mark well this fact. If we would come to this Child and find Him, we must not be guided by our thoughts or by human reason, but must follow the Word of God, and not turn from it in the least. As soon as we lose sight of the Word we go astray. Whoever departs from the Word . . . will certainly be mistaken and not find Christ. . . . In this connection we must also remember the great blessing bestowed upon the Gentiles. God calls them also into the kingdom of Christ, and accepts them as His people. In this we, who are of Gentile origin, have a sure declaration that Christ came for us, and that we can have Him as our Savior, as well as the Jews, though we are not of that people whom He called His own." John 3, 16. Rom. 1, 16.

3. They fall down and worship Christ, v. 11. They believed in Christ though they had never seen Him; though priests and scribes were unbelieving; though they found Him in the manger at Bethlehem and not at Jerusalem; though they saw Him a little infant,

helpless, weak. LUTHER: "In this the wise men furnish us with an excellent example of a living, powerful faith." They worship Christ. This was the crowning point of their faith. We read of no greater faith than this in the whole Bible. LUTHER: "The wise men were heathen. Nevertheless, God accepts them, and receives their adoration and gifts. This is written for our consolation, in order that we should praise God who has, in Christ Jesus, established a kingdom upon earth into which we also are called, not on account of our merits, but through the mercy of God, though we are not of His people."

4. They finally open their treasures and present unto Him gifts, v. 11. LUTHER: "Inasmuch as Christ's kingdom upon earth has no outward power and glory, we ought cheerfully to give of our money and of our possessions to aid in its extension and increase. For, surely, we of the present day are as well able as were the wise men of old to open our treasures for Him." Matt. 25, 40. "Therefore, whoever with his money and property assists poor and forsaken persons, or contributes to the support of schools and institutions, in which young persons are educated in the Word of God and in the sciences to become useful in the service of the Church, gives in reality his offerings unto Jesus." J. C. A.

First Sunday after Epiphany.

LUKE 2, 41—52.

It is frequently urged that matters of religion should not be forced upon the attention of young children; that children are not able to grasp the great truths of the Christian religion; that the child should be permitted to decide when the rite of Confirmation is to be administered, etc. Piety, it is thought, must come with mature age. But this is a mistake, as may be seen from the lives of thousands who were not brought under Christian influences in their youth, and who refused Christian nurture when they had reached what is commonly called the age of discretion. This question calls for serious thought on the part of Christians. He who has the children has the future. The future welfare of the Church depends in no small measure on what we make our children. For a Christian, then, the watchword must be: Pious children, early piety!

EARLY PIETY.

I. *Parents and elders should foster it.*

a. How may they do so? a. By leading pious, godly lives themselves, thus setting an example which their children may safely follow. From what we know of Joseph and Mary, they led a godly

life, v. 41; cf. v. 39. Example is often better than mere precept. Never should precept and example be at variance. An ungodly life on the part of elders must militate in some degree against piety in the children. β . By making diligent use of those means which God has placed at their disposal for this very end. When Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem, they took the Child Jesus with them to the sanctuary, v. 42. And so Christian parents to-day ought to make it a practice to take their children with them to divine worship, whenever this is possible and feasible. The objection is sometimes raised that the service is practically lost upon the child, but a little questioning and observation reveals the fact that a child understands and remembers more than we think it does. The Word as it is preached is a means of grace also to the children. — There is also the service intended especially for the children, the Sunday school, the *Christenlehre*. Parents who have the welfare of their children at heart should make use of this means to foster the inner life of their children; so, too, they will never regret having made use of the religious day school when the opportunity was offered to them. But the Word must be applied also in the home, at the family altar, where children must hear about their Savior. Above all things, prayer is needed. There is much that parents can do to foster piety. Let them pattern after such examples as the Patriarchs, Hannah, the mother of Samuel, 1 Sam. 1. 2; Lois, the grandmother, and Eunice, the mother of Timothy, 2 Tim. 1, 5; Monica, the mother of St. Augustine, of whom Neander says: "Whatever treasures of virtue and worth the life of faith . . . can bestow were set before him in the example of his pious mother."

b. Why should parents be willing to cultivate piety in their children? α . Children are a gift of God, given to parents as a sacred trust. These children have "a never-dying soul to save." God therefore demands of parents that they lead their children, as far as in them lies, to the Savior, Eph. 6, 4. This is a service which parents cannot perform too early for their children. God has not stipulated how long the children shall live. If He see fit to call them away early in life, they should be prepared to meet Him. Because it is the earnest will of God, and because they shall be held accountable for their children, Christian parents should foster piety in their children. If there were no other reason, this would suffice. β . But the blessing of God rests upon their efforts. It is little enough that parents can do. Through the means, however, which they apply God works faith in the hearts of the children, makes them living members of His Church. In case the children should be taken from them, the parents have the comfort of knowing that they are

saved. God blesses parents also in temporal matters for their labor of love. Children who have been reared in the fear of God as a rule honor and obey their parents, care for them in their old age, etc. The fact that some children go astray in spite of their religious training (Cain, Esau, Absalom, St. Augustine) is no argument against the position taken above. If the parents have done their duty, God will not hold them responsible for the sins of their children. Moreover, many such wayward ones return to the Lord in later life.

II. *Children should strive for it.*

a. What motives should prompt them to do so? *α.* The example of their Lord and Master, vv. 46. 49. The Child Jesus finds His delight in the sanctuary. It is His great desire to be about His heavenly Father's business. This same Jesus later in His ministry blessed little children, and expressed a desire that they should be brought to Him. When He says, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven," He is speaking of pious children. All children should have the earnest desire to be like Him, for His was the beautiful life. Every child, every young man, and every young woman should learn that this is the only life worth living. It is true, Jesus was perfectly holy, while we are sinful; but in spite of our sins, God has made it possible for us to lead pious lives. Through His means of grace God sanctifies us. *β.* The fact that a pious youth alone is pleasing to God. It is true, we do not merit the grace of God by our piety; piety, however, is an evidence, a fruit of the faith that is in us, and as such is acceptable to Him. God frequently manifests His pleasure by blessing such children openly. Examples: Joseph in Egypt, Ruth. Yea, God blesses also the parents and others for the sake of pious children, Prov. 23, 24. 25. *γ.* The fact that a youth passed in impiety must incur the wrath and displeasure of God, besides bringing shame and sorrow upon parents and children alike. God manifests His wrath through punishment, temporal and eternal. If a godless child should seem to escape the temporal, the eternal punishment is in store for it beyond a doubt. The life of such a child manifests itself in various sins, and for these it is punished. 2 Kings 2, 23. 24. Gal. 6, 7. It should be remembered also that there is no middle ground here. A child is either pious or unbelieving. If the latter, it brings sorrow also to its parents; the sons of Jacob, Gen. 37, 35. 42, 36. 38; Absalom.

b. Which are the obstacles which they must be prepared to encounter? *α.* Their own sinful flesh will make the path of rectitude seem distasteful to them. *β.* Satan will use his utmost endeavors to discourage them, by luring them to some sin, or otherwise. *γ.* The children of this world will ridicule them, will try to show them that

they ought to enjoy their youth, that there is time enough for a godly life a few years hence. These enemies a child which has dedicated itself to God must learn to combat, by using the Word of God. O that all the children of the Church might lead pious, godly lives, and that parents and elders might do all in their power to keep them in the narrow path. (*Hymnbook*, No. 150.) G. A. W.

Second Sunday after Epiphany.

JOHN 2, 1—11.

When God sent Moses to Egypt, in order to deliver His people from their bondage, He gave him power to perform three miracles, and instructed him to do these miracles before Pharaoh, in order to convince him that God must have sent him. So Moses went to Egypt. But Pharaoh did not believe him. His sorcerers, by the help of Satan, imitated the miracles which Moses performed, and though Aaron's staff devoured theirs, thus showing the superiority of God over Satan, yet Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not consent to let Israel go. — This story teaches us two things: 1. There have been, and still are, false miracles, performed by the emissaries of Satan. 2. On the other hand, a true miracle is indeed a proof that a man is sent by God. — But one man there was whose miracles proved more than that He was *sent* by God. Jesus of Nazareth demonstrated by His miracles that He was the *only-begotten Son of God*. This we learn from our text, which tells us that by His miracle at the wedding of Cana

“JESUS MANIFESTED FORTH HIS GLORY, AND HIS DISCIPLES BELIEVED ON HIM.”

I. “*Jesus manifested forth His glory.*”

The story of the miracle brings this out most clearly:

a. Jesus chose His own time for performing His miracles, v. 4. This points out an important difference between His miracles and those of the prophets and apostles. *α*. The latter could not choose their own time, but were able to perform their miracles only at such times as God designated. They did not at all times have the power to perform the miracles they did. It was not their own power, therefore, but only delegated, given to them. *β*. It was different in the case of Jesus. He performed His miracles when His own hour came. He chose His own time for their performance. This shows that He at all times possessed the power to do them. This was because the power was His own. He was almighty, even during His state of greatest humility. And when He chose, He permitted a

flash of His divine majesty to pierce the clouds that veiled it. Thus did Christ here, as well as by His other miracles, "manifest forth His glory."

b. Jesus chose His own manner of performing His miracles. His mother, encouraged by the words He had spoken to her, that, when His hour came, He would supply the lack of wine, bade the servants do whatsoever He should say to them, v. 5. She was convinced that He would help, but could not foresee in what way He would do it. And she was not put to shame in her belief. Jesus did supply the wine, but He did it in a way that neither she nor any other human being could have foreseen. He chose His own way of doing it. And here again is a fundamental difference between Christ's miracles and those of the prophets and apostles. *a.* These holy men of God could perform their miracles only in a way which God prescribed. Moses must throw his staff upon the ground, etc., must speak to the rock or strike it, to bring out the water. The disciples, who attempted to heal the lunatic, failed, because "this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." *β.* But Jesus performed His miracles as He chose. Here He chooses to make wine out of water. Once He heals a leper by merely saying, "I will, be thou clean"; at another time He sends the ten lepers to the priests, to show themselves to them according to the law of Moses, etc. This, too, shows, that He possessed almighty power, for only Omnipotence can perform miracles as it chooses. Thus again did Jesus "manifest forth His glory."

c. Jesus performed His miracles in His own name. There is no indication whatever in the text that He was dependent upon anyone else in changing the water to wine. He simply proceeds to tell the servants to fill the waterpots and then to empty them, and during this process of filling and drawing out the mysterious transubstantiation had taken place, by the power of His almighty will alone. Here, then, is a third vital difference between Christ's miracles and those of the prophets and apostles. *a.* These holy men could perform their miracles in the name of Another only. Moses tells the people of Israel that he is sent by Jehovah to deliver them, and in Jehovah's name does he turn the staff into a serpent, etc. Elijah stretches himself over the dead child of his benefactress, and beseeches God in prayer that He may let the child's soul come into him again. Peter says to the lame man at the temple-gate, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk." Etc. The prophets and apostles performed their miracles in the name of God, or of His Son, or prayed to God to perform them. *β.* But Jesus performed His miracles in His own name and by His own power. He made the wine by His own power. He said to the corpse of the

young man at Nain, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise!" Even where He prayed to God before performing a miracle, as in the case of Lazarus, He still performed it by His own power. Yes, Christ arose from His own grave by His own power. His miracles were done in His own name, and by His own power. Thus again did He "manifest forth His glory."

II. "*And His disciples believed on Him.*"

a. The effect of this great miracle, as indeed it could not have been otherwise, served as a mighty confirmation of the faith of Jesus' disciples. *α.* This does not imply that before this time they had not believed in Him. The inference to be made is merely this, that before they had been weak in their faith, had perhaps at times been afflicted with doubts regarding His Messiahship. If they had had no faith at all, they surely would not have forsaken all in order to follow Him. *β.* But their weak and wavering faith was mightily strengthened by this and by His subsequent miracles. They reasoned correctly: He who can perform such a miracle must be more than a mere man. He who thus dispenses with the laws of nature at His pleasure must be the Lord of nature. Yes, He must be the almighty Son of God, He must be the promised Messiah. And in this faith, strengthened and confirmed here and by Christ's later miracles, particularly by that of His resurrection from the dead, in this faith did the disciples go and convert the world to their own faith.

b. But it is only the disciples of whom we are told that this miracle caused them to believe on Him. *α.* Not indeed were they the only ones. Outside of the narrower circle of the apostles and the seventy there were others who also sincerely accepted Christ and thus also became His disciples in a wider sense; notably the faithful women, of whom we read so often. *β.* But the great multitude, though they at times also hailed Him with joy as the great prophet, in the end rejected Him and caused His crucifixion, bringing down His blood upon them and upon their children. Woe unto those who refuse to believe in Jesus, though He "manifests forth His glory" before their eyes!

c. Whose example will we follow? That of the multitude, or that of the disciples? Yes, also to us Jesus "manifests forth His glory." Is not the fact, that His Church exists to-day, that it has survived all the persecutions and onslaughts of its enemies, that His Book, the Bible, has not long ago been swept out of existence, etc., a miracle of His almighty power? Yes, truly, Jesus is to-day "manifesting forth His glory" the same as He did at Cana of Galilee.—God grant that, like His disciples, we may "believe on Him."

G. L.

Sermon Outline on Acts 15, 3.

The word *conversion* (ἐπιστροφή) only occurs once in the Bible. It denotes a change or turn from one object to another, from one way or road to another, from evil toward God.

ON CONVERSION.

Mark:—

I. *Its nature.*

With regard to conversion two things may be observed:

a. What conversion implies. 1. Alienation from God, 1 Cor. 12, 2. Is. 53, 6. Ps. 119, 176. 2. Enmity towards God, Rom. 8, 7. James 4, 4.

b. What conversion includes. 1. An internal change of man—heart—principle—comfort and enjoyment. Prove this by passages and instances of the Bible, by words and facts! 2. An external change of man; conduct; conversation. Saul—Paul, Acts 9.

II. *Its Author.*

a. Not man. By nature man, every man, is spiritually blind, dead, and an enemy of God, 1 Cor. 2, 14. Eph. 2, 1. Rom. 8, 7. 1 Cor. 12, 3.—Not man and God. Man is passive, not active.

b. God, and God alone, is the Author of conversion. It is a precious and gracious gift of the Holy Ghost, Phil. 2, 13. Jer. 31, 18. Ezek. 36, 26, 27. 2 Cor. 4, 6.—Matt. 16, 17. Acts 16, 14. Ministers cannot open the hearts of their hearers, cannot convert them; God alone can do it.

III. *Its means.*

a. Not prayer, not good works, nor any human invention.

b. Word and sacrament are the means, the only means, by which the Holy Ghost effects conversion, 1 Pet. 1, 23. James 1, 18. Rom. 10, 17.—Tit. 3, 5, 6.

Come, all ye wretched sinners, come,
He'll form your souls anew;
His Gospel and His heart have room
For rebels such as you.

J. C. A.
